Gateway to the West

Lee County Historical and Genealogical Society P. O Box 231 Jonesville, Virginia 24263 *July 2025*

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President's Report

By Becky Jones

This newsletter is going to be a little late this time. My husband and I both are having some health issues. Sometimes these golden years are a little rusted. It has been a good and busy time for the Lee County Historical Society. We are still working on several projects and having monthly meetings with good speakers. There is always something to be done at our building besides mowing and weed-eating. We have a lady bug problem in the spring. Our phone and internet service have had to be upgraded. Our new webpage is up and running. We are now putting our speakers on YouTube and have Facebook live. We have also added PayPal to buy our books online and pay dues. Many Thanks to Ken and Jessica for doing this.

We are going ahead with the Civil War project and had a great turn out for the 250 Boone's Trace Celebration we cohosted with The Friends of the Cedars group at the Natural Bridge.

Ken has been working hard at getting all the items in the museum cataloged. He is working on preserving and making sure it is in acid free boxes, etc. All documents are being preserved so that they will be present for the future generations to view and enjoy. We have agreed to support Terry Hubbard in his works to get Historical Landmarks in the lower end of the county. He is leading

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A Few School and Family Memories - William Shelburne Cox (1875-1968)

Compiled by Susan Elliott-Chikar

In 1889 W. S. Cox attended the Old Oak Grove School and told this story about why the next year he was sent to the Jonesville Academy. In 1889 Miss Mollie Flanary "began teaching there [Old Oak Grove School] and for some reason or no reason became tired of the place and set it on fire one evening after dismissing the school. This is…true. I was in position to know." The school, later rebuilt, was where four of the Cox children received their primary education in the early 1900s before attending Jonesville Institute. [Source: "A Few Notes on Schools" handwritten notes by W. S. Cox]

As a student, W. S. Cox attended the Jonesville Academy from 1890 until the spring of 1893. He also taught there for three years - during the 1896-'97 term and after it was renamed the Jonesville Institute during the 1902-'03 and 1919-'20 terms.

W. S. Cox taught for 30 years in the Virginia Public Schools. He started teaching in 1893 at the age of 17. All prospective teachers were required to take

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Nathan Van Landwyck

Caleb Campbell

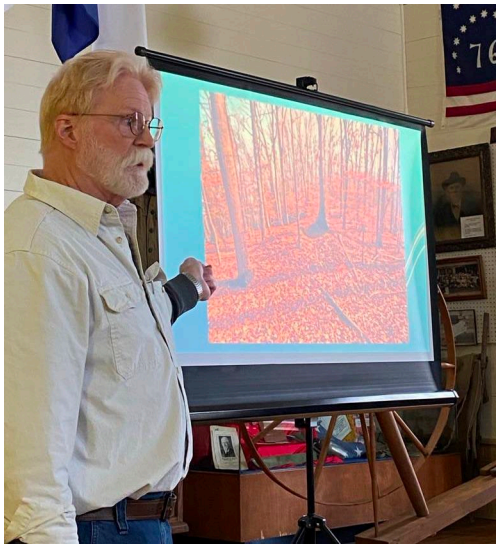
President's Report *from page 1*

the Gibson Station Historical Committee in recognizing and preserving the important historical legacy of Gibson Station, VA.

We have had several new Life-members since January: Thomas Andis, Vera Ely, Leslie Bell-Stanton, Scotty Ayers and Susan Elliott- Chikar. Thank you for your memberships and the donations that are helping us keep Lee History alive.

Our first meeting of the year was in February with our speaker, Nathan Van Landwyck, an exchange student from Belgium who spoke about the exchange program and his home in Belgium. In March, Ken Roddenberry talked about the Boone Trace 250 Relay and the society's involvement in the events. Luke Moore was the speaker for April and spoke about his research on the Powell Valley Massacre. For May, the Historical Society did not have a meeting; instead, the society joined the events of the Boone Trace 250 Relay. The speaker for June was Caleb Campbell, the author of Frontier Roots, Modern Branches, the Story of Lee County, Virginia, who talked about his insights into writing his book. In July, Greg Edwards talked about the early explorers of Lee County.

Greg Edwards



Luke Moore

A Few School and Family Memories *continued from page 1*

a teacher examination. If they passed, their score determined their monthly salary and number of years they could teach before again having to take the examination. Certificates awarded were for 1, 2, or 3 years. W. S. Cox was issued a Level 2 Teacher Certificate which enabled him to teach for 2 years and it is believed his monthly salary was $24.00. [Source: W. S. Cox personal papers; Application for Pension]

After teaching four years, in 1897, he attended Emory and Henry College, graduating in 1900 with a B. A. degree. He returned to Lee County and taught for the next four years. [Source: W. S. Cox Application for Pension]

By the fall of 1904 when his father, N. S. Cox, became seriously ill, W. S. Cox retired to focus on farming. His father died in January 1905. In June he married Ida Mae Roop, the girl next door. In 1907 he was approached by Alexander Litton and Thomas Graham to return as principal of the newly built Flatwoods High School. The principal they had hired had "vanished" and unless they found a suitable replacement the school could not open in September. W. S. Cox tells the story:

> "Camp Meeting was in progress and I, as usual, was in attendance. On Saturday I was approached by Thomas Graham and Alexander Litton, two patrons of the new school. 'We want you to take charge of our new school,' they said. 'Nothing doing,' I replied. 'I have retired. I am now engaged in farming.' I had…decided to turn my attention to farming and stock raising and furthermore, I had recently taken on a life partner. But the men were insistent and persistent."
>
> "They argued and pleaded and said, 'You pray over this, Brother, Cox, and we'll come back again." I didn't want to pray over Flatwoods, but I did want the good Lord to provide good seasons for farming."
>
> "On Monday morning I was busy working in the garden when three horsemen passed along the highway. I scarcely noticed them, but a short time later the three came into the garden and then I recognized them. "Well, Brother Cox, we have put up our horses and fed them. We have come to board with you until you agree to teach our school. What do you want us to work at?' That was a stunner. That was an ultimatum."

"We had dinner and rested a bit. My wife said, 'I don't want these loafers here all summer. Go and teach their school. We can manage and get along all right.' So that is how I was drafted to Flatwoods."

[Source: "Brief History of Flatwoods High School" by W. S. Cox, Aug. 4, 1966, newspaper unknown.]

NATHAN SWORD COX HOUSE - original dwelling ca. 1800 [Sources: W. S. Cox; Winnie W. (Cox) Elliott (1912-2016); Wm. Frederick Cox, Sr. (1910-1998); "William S. Cox Home" WPA of Va. Historical Inventory, Dec. 11, 1937]:

Nathan Sword Cox (1842-1905), father of W. S. Cox, purchased his farm on May 24, 1884. The farmhouse, still standing today, is located on Rt. 58 about 1 ½ miles east of Jonesville and has been remodeled several times over the years. The original dwelling was built about 1800 by Daniel S. Dickenson. It's not known if any changes were made between 1800 and 1884. Part of the original 1800 structure is said to have been incorporated into the first floor of the 1890 renovation by N. S. Cox. After the renovation, the top two bedrooms were often rented to lodgers, such as teachers and people from the courthouse (judges, lawyers, jurors) during trials.

W. S. Cox said "People living near Jonesville would either hike to the normal school [Jonesville Academy] or go on horseback. Teachers not in easy reach of Jonesville secured lodging at one of the three hotels in Jonesville or some nearby place. I have known as many as 25 who boarded at my father's home and walked to the Academy each morning. They got their lodging and meals for 25 cents a day, carrying their lunch in a basket."

On Dec. 13, 1904, shortly before his death, N. S. Cox deeded the house to his son W. S. Cox. W. S. Cox extensively renovated it in 1910 and 1911, incorporating the 1890 house. According to the description of the William S. Cox house in the 1937 WPA Virginia Historical Inventory "This home has been remodeled and rebuilt until one is unable to see any of the old home. Now it is a very nice home." The house remained in the Cox family for 100 years until sold in the 1980s.

Still standing today above the farmhouse is part of an original wooden building the W. S. Cox family called the "woodshed." The family lived here during the 1910-1911 remodel and at that time it had a 2nd floor. Winnie (Cox) Elliott, daughter of W. S. Cox recalled: "During the time when the new section was built onto the house, the Cox family lived in the room at the end of the woodshed which had one great big room with a wooden floor. It had

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A Few School and Family Memories *continued from page 3*

a cook stove, a table, chairs and two beds. One for Will and Ida and one for the children, Roy and Ethel. Fred was born on June 23, 1910 during the renovation."

Description of 1890 Renovations by N. S. Cox [Source: July 1998 W. F. Cox interview, son of W. S. Cox]:

- 2-story house, each story approx. 36' by 36' with a fireplace in the middle of the house.
  - Upstairs: 2 bedrooms, each abt. 18' X 18'
  - Downstairs: 1 bedroom, abt. 18' X 18'; Dinning room/kitchen area, abt. 18' X 18'
  - Porch: Each story had a porch running the house length, one above the other. Porch width unknown. On porch, outside staircase from the 1st floor to the 2nd; unknown where positioned.
  - Porch doors open into each 2nd floor bedroom, unknown exact location.
  - Windows on each side of house, unknown exact locations.

The caption on the back of the photo, written by W.S. Cox reads:"The N. S. Cox homestead about 1890, from left to right, Will, Charlie, Nathan S., Barthena." These people are:
William S. Cox (1875-1968), abt. age 15; Charlie S. Cox (1872-1863), abt. age 18; Nathan S. Cox (1842-1905); and 2nd wife Barthena (Williams) Cox (1857-1929)
[NOTE: Nathan S. Cox's first wife and mother of the boys was Mary "Mollie" Gobble (1845-1878).]

A Legacy in Stitches: The Musick Quilt and Portraits Donated to the Historical Society

by Ken Roddenberry

On July 23, 2025, the Lee County Historical and Genealogical Society received a remarkable textile artifact and framed portraits from Trish Bowman Maloomian (Charlotte, NC), great granddaughter of Rev. Elexious Ferrell Musick and Rebecca Ann Jessee Musick. The donation included a quilt embroidered with Rev. Musick's initials and the date Jan. 1893, as well as a framed double portrait of the minister and his wife. Both items are now preserved in the Society's permanent collection.

The quilt is a vibrant example of a late 19th-century Victorian "crazy quilt" composed of irregular, asymmetrical fabric pieces - velvet, silk, cotton, and wool - joined by decorative embroidery. The quilt is arranged in five blocks across by five blocks down, each featuring a distinctive design, such as, stitched grape clusters, floral sprays, fans, butterflies, and fanciful embellishments like ribbon roses and a child blowing bubbles. Two blocks are particularly notable: one bears the initials "E.F.M." (Elexious Ferrell Musick), and the other, "L.M.C.", possibly refers to a "Ladies Missionary Circle," a common Baptist women's auxiliary group of the era. While the maker or church affiliation of the quilt remains uncertain, its quality and symbolism suggest it was lovingly created by women in one of the congregations Rev. Musick served.

Rev. E.F. Musick was born October 4, 1853, in Russell County, Virginia, the son of David Musick, a farmer, and Sarah Ferrell Musick. His grandfather, also named Elexious Musick (1788–1874), was a farmer and slaveholder listed in the 1860 slave schedule, and may have had formative influence on the young boy. Little is documented about Elexious's early schooling, but by age 16 he was working on the family farm. By 1880, he was employed as a schoolteacher in the Elk Garden District of Russell County.

On February 6, 1882, he married Rebecca Ann Jessee, daughter of Rev. John Banner Jessee and Dartha "Dolly" Candler of Lee County. The ceremony was performed by her father. The couple had three children born in Russell County: Judson Taylor Musick (b. 1883), Ryland Christmas Musick (b. 1884), and Ruth Lee Musick (b. 1888). Ruth, affectionately remembered by Trish as "Aunt Oose," never married. Elexious and Rebecca Musick likely returned to Lee County for the burials of her parents, mother in 1888 and father in 1891.

Rev. Musick's ministry began in earnest in the 1880s and was well-documented in regional Baptist publications. The *Tazewell Baptist* (April 1890) listed him as pastor in Honaker, Virginia, and a delegate to the Southern Baptist Convention. The *Roanoke Baptist Union* (Dec. 1893) reported that he had conducted a nine-day revival in Lee County, leading to the formation of a church with 40 members—possibly predating his later association with Jonesville Baptist Church, which was officially organized in December 1892.

From 1893 to 1897, Musick lived in Chatham, Virginia, serving as pastor of Elba Baptist Church near Gretna. The *Roanoke Baptist Union* (Feb. 1894) reported that he thanked a member, Sister Holt at Elba, for a quilt given to him at Christmas—suggesting a tradition of honoring ministers through such gifts. In 1897, he returned to Russell County and was preaching in the Tazewell area by late 1898.

It is likely during this time that Musick's connection with Lee County deepened. His father-in-law, Rev. John Jessee, had long served as pastor at Dryden Baptist Church, and family visits likely strengthened the bond between Musick and the region's Baptist leadership. In 1899, Rev. Musick was invited to serve as pastor of Jonesville Baptist Church, becoming its third minister. He served until October 1900.

Jonesville Baptist was originally organized on December 13, 1892, and held early services at Oak Grove School and New Hope Meeting House before completing its new building in 1898. Rev. Musick joined the church shortly after its dedication and became active in the Powell River Baptist Association. In 1895, he was appointed to its Committee on Woman's Work and advocated for the formation of Women's Missionary Societies in all

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churches of the association. He also chaired the Orphanage Committee in 1900, promoting support for the Baptist Orphanage in Salem, Virginia.

Musick moved his family to Scott County, Kentucky, around 1900. The U.S. Census that year records him as a Baptist preacher with three school-age children. In Kentucky, he served in the Elkhorn Baptist Association, preaching at Sharon and Silas Baptist Churches through 1906. A note from him published in 1902 in the *Roanoke Baptist Union* expressed homesickness for Virginia, and affection for the people of the Roanoke Association.

Musick's wife Rebecca Ann Jessee Musick died in 1907, and while no official death certificate has been located, family genealogical records mark her burial in Pennington Gap Town Cemetery. After her passing, Musick appears to have returned to Lee County. In 1909, the *Lebanon News* reported that Rev. "Leck" Musick of Lee County attended the Baptist Association of Cleveland and visited Lebanon. The 1910 census listed him in Pennington Gap, residing with son Judson and daughter Ruth, with his occupation again noted as "minister."

Rev. Musick died of complications from stomach ulcers on May 24, 1911, at St. Joseph's Infirmary in Louisville, Kentucky, after five weeks of treatment.

His sons, R.C. Musick, editor of the *Jackson Times* (KY), and Judson Musick, accompanied his remains to Pennington Gap for burial beside Rebecca.

Obituaries appeared in the *Lebanon News*, *Roanoke Evening News*, and *Big Stone Gap Post*, which noted his former pastorate in that town.

During the reception for the quilt and portrait donations, Trish Bowman Maloomian shared personal stories about "Aunt Oose" and the family's history. Also present was Debbie Jessee, great-granddaughter of one of Rebecca Ann Jessee's brothers, making the two women cousins through the Jessee line. Their visit united two branches of the Musick and Jessee families and gave context to these precious objects.

The Lee County Historical and Genealogical Society is honored to accept this donation and ensure its preservation. The Musick quilt and accompanying portraits offer a tangible, deeply personal link to Lee County's Baptist heritage and the individuals who shaped its spiritual and cultural life at the turn of the 20th century.

If you would like to review photographs of the quilt blocks, please go to our website at www.leecountyvahistoricalsociety.org or visit in-person during a regular meeting or by appointment.

A Glimpse Into Our County's Past: The Bible of Lethe Ann Sheets *by Ken Roddenberry*

A recent study of an heirloom Bible has revealed fascinating details about the interconnected lives of several Lee County families—and even a few surprises hidden within its pages. Thanks to enhanced image processing and the help of one of our own members, we've confirmed that this Bible belonged to Lethe Ann Sheets, born March 13, 1863, who passed away on October 6, 1913. She is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, a testament to the Sheets family's deep roots in our community.

This Bible was generously loaned to the Lee County Historical and Genealogical Society many years ago by Jessica Moore, Lethe Ann's 3rd great-grandniece and a valued member of our Society. At the time, Jessica did not know much about the Bible or whose it had originally been—she had always hoped someone could decipher the faint handwriting inside. She was surprised beyond belief to learn that our research had revealed family connections she had never known.

Our initial findings appeared on the Society's blog under the title "A Family Heirloom: The 1868 Bible of Lottie Ann Sheets." That article sparked community interest and led Jessica to come forward with valuable corrections and insights that have helped us piece together an even richer family story.

Inside the Bible's inner cover is Lethe's name: "Lethe Ann Sheets Hur book." Additional faint handwritten entries include names like "M. M. Sheets," "Sarah," and "was born 1863," which initially helped identify family connections. With Jessica's help, we learned that some names had been misread—"Ben Wilson" was actually Ben Nelson, and "Lottie Ann Sheets" was confirmed as Lethe Ann Sheets. Using these corrections, we pieced together relationships through Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

The Sheets, Nelson, and Maxie Families

Lethe Ann Sheets never married, and it appears she passed the Bible to her sister, Virginia Josephine "Josie" Sheets, before her death in 1913. Virginia had married Jim Nelson in the late 1800s but was a widow by 1900. She had three sons, including Ben Harrison "Harris" Nelson, who is the same "Ben" recorded in the Bible. Ben enlisted in the armed forces in 1917 at age 21, serving at Camp Humphreys (now Fort Belvoir, Virginia), and was honorably discharged in 1919.

Ben later married Syble Maxie, daughter of Charlie Maxey and Martha McGee/McGhee, who was born in 1908. Although no marriage certificate has been found, census records confirm they were husband and wife, though it appears they did not have children.

Family Artifacts: A Window into the Past

Tucked among the pages of this remarkable Bible were several poignant artifacts:

● A lock of straight brown hair, likely from an adult woman, carefully preserved within its pages. While its exact owner remains unknown, it may have belonged to Lethe Ann Sheets herself or perhaps her sister, Virginia Josephine "Josie" Sheets. Such keepsakes were often saved to remember a beloved family member who had passed away. The lock was found in the Book of Romans, though this placement may have been simply by chance.

● A pressed flower possibly commemorating the same person as the lock of hair. Pressed flowers were often saved alongside locks of hair as tokens of remembrance, adding a floral tribute to the personal memory.

● A World War II ration stamp, a reminder of sacrifices made on the home front.

● A one-cent postage stamp, linking the Bible's story to everyday correspondence. One-cent stamps were commonly used from the late 1800s through the early 1900s, especially for mailing postcards and local letters. Its presence in the Bible hints at the ways families stayed in touch during that era.

● A store receipt dated 1944 from D. (Dahar) Cury's Department Store, containing a list of merchandise purchased from one of his locations in Lee and Wise Counties. Dahar Cury was born in Syria in 1883 and, together with his wife Elizabeth (also born in Syria), became a naturalized citizen of the United States. They lived in Norton, Wise County, Virginia, during the 1930 and 1940 US Censuses. Dahar passed away in 1948 and was buried in Wise County. His department stores served many local families, and the Cury family's story did not end there. Their eldest daughter, Mary Cury, continued the family's merchant tradition when she married Michael Salaitia, a Syrian and a merchant, in 1935 in Appalachia, Virginia. Together, they carried on the local tradition of family-run stores in Lee and Wise Counties, including Farid's in Jonesville and Mike's in Big Stone Gap, weaving their family's legacy deeply into the economic and social fabric of the region.

● An obituary clipping for Colby S. Goins, a taxi driver born in 1911 who died in 1960 and was buried in Morgan Cemetery in Rose Hill, Colby

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The Bible of Lethe Ann Sheets

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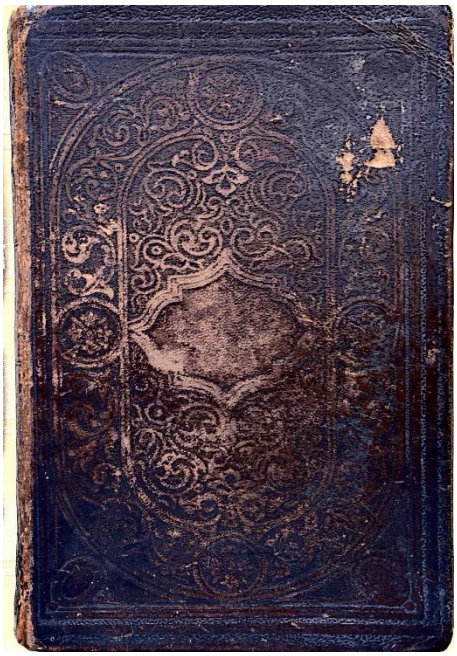

married Jincy Catherine Wilson Jones in 1959, establishing a possible connection to the Jones family also noted in the Bible. This obituary clipping, nestled in the Bible's pages, provides a tangible family link and reminds us how closely intertwined these local families were.

The Jones Family

Lethe Ann's older sister, Mary Margaret Sheets, married Hiram Jones, and they had at least four children: Robert D. (1883–1943), Sarah J. (1886–), Dora (1889–), and William F. (1898–1919). The Bible includes handwritten entries for Robert Jones (born Jan. 21, 1882) and Sarah J. Jones (born Feb. 18, 1885), though the dates differ slightly from census records. Another faint entry suggests a birth date of July 19, 1881, though the name is unclear. The Goins-Jones marriage adds another intriguing layer to the interconnected family web.

Additional Context from the 1900 Census

The 1900 US Census for Hancock County, Tennessee, confirms Lethe Ann Sheets—called "Anna" in the census—was living at home, single, age 37. She was listed with her parents, Benjamin Franklin Sheets (1830–1921) and Leethe Ann Nelson, and her sister Virginia, who was a widow at age 40. Virginia's son "Harris"—our Ben Nelson—was also living there. Next door, Mary Sheets Jones and her family lived, linking these households in close proximity and highlighting the close-knit nature of these families.

Preserving Our Heritage

This Bible, with its handwritten notes and hidden treasures, stands as a bridge between generations—connecting the Sheets, Nelson, Maxie, Parkey, Goins, Jones, Cury, and Salaitia families. Each name, date, and artifact within its pages deepens our understanding of the lives, relationships, and history that shaped our county. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Jessica Moore, Lethe Ann's 3rd great-grandniece, for entrusting us with this family treasure. Her generosity—and her delight at discovering new insights—remind us of the importance of sharing knowledge and preserving family heirlooms for future generations.

Explore More

Photos of the Bible inscriptions and its fascinating contents are available on our Historical Society's website for those interested in exploring this remarkable artifact in greater detail. Special thanks go to Ken Roddenberry, who researched and wrote this article, piecing together clues from census records, local history, and family stories to reveal the rich legacy hidden within these pages.